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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002883

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TAGS: PGOV PREL I2

SUBJECT: MAYSAN SADRISTS, ISCI PRESS U.S. TO PRESSURE THE PRIME MINISTER TO RELEASE FUNDS

REF: BAGHDAD 2806

Classified By: Senior Advisor Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Sadrists and ISCI provincial leaders in Maysan asserted to Senior Advisor Gordon Gray on September 3 that they are not associated with militias and that they want to work with the U.S. to promote security and development. Sadrists leveled sharp criticisms at Prime Minister Maliki, complaining that increased militarization hinders the government's ability to deliver services. They also praised Coalition Forces for having a positive influence on Iraqi Army treatment of detainees. The Provincial Director of Reconstruction, in a joint meeting with the new Deputy Governor, argued that Maysan needs direct U.S. support to push the Prime Minister to release development funds promised after June 2008 security operations in the province. Specifically, they requested U.S. presence at an upcoming meeting with Kurdish Deputy Prime Minister Barham Saleh and representatives of several Government of Iraq (GOI) ministries. End summary.

Sadrists PR campaign continues

¶2. (C) In a meeting with Gray and PRT Team Leader at FOB Garry Owen, Provincial Council (PC) member Mohammed Wahid, founder of the Sadrists umbrella organization that controls the PC and the governorship in Maysan, continued his campaign to convince U.S. officials that Sadrists are not working with Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) (reftel). He compared JAM militants to "an American soldier who shoots a bullet in the Koran" -- with the former not being representative of the Sadrists and the latter not being representative of the U.S. When asked about Muqtada al-Sadr's recent edict to move from politics to social services, Wahid blamed Iranian intelligence for filtering information that goes to Muqtada. While Wahid would not give straight answers to questions about Muqtada, he seemed to believe that the edict was not to be taken literally. He also said that ISCI/Badr, not the Sadrists Hussein Ideology Front, is the prime conduit for Iranian influence in the province.

¶3. (C) Wahid leveled strong criticism at the Iraqi Army and Prime Minister (PM) Maliki. Discussing the role of 10th Army Division Commander Habib in security operations, Wahid said: "he was just out for revenge...The real militants escaped through Maysan and Wasit to Iran." He contended that PM Maliki's heavy role in security operations was directly limiting the government's ability to provide services. In Wahid's view, the Prime Minister has taken advantage of popular support for early withdrawal of Coalition Forces to set up a system in which "no government business gets done unless the (Iraqi) army takes care of it." Wahid also emphasized that local Sadrists opinion of the U.S. has risen recently because many party members who were detained by Iraqi troops during security operations thought they would be

tortured, but were treated well in prison, with regular visits by human rights organizations. He said that the detainees credit Coalition Forces for influencing the Iraqi Army to treat prisoners better.

Coordination With U.S. Desired

¶4. (C) Wahid was accompanied by Zaid al-Hoshi, the Provincial Director of Reconstruction and a close aide to the province's Sadrists governor. First in the meeting with Wahid, and later in a second meeting with Gray accompanied by Deputy Governor and ISCI/Badr provincial deputy party chief Abdul Hussein Adbul-Ridha Rasan, Hoshi pressed for more cooperation with the U.S. on reconstruction efforts. Hoshi said that he wanted the Embassy (through PRT Maysan) to play a big role in the area for the next several years, similar to what it does currently in Najaf and Karbala. (Note: Najaf and Karbala are provinces under Iraqi control, have active PRTs carrying out multiple development projects, and have a very limited U.S. military presence at Forward Operating Bases. End note.) The Deputy Governor echoed Hoshi's positions, emphasizing that university and medical facilities are in particular need of upgrades, including a chemical laboratory.

Meeting with Barham Saleh?

¶5. (C) Hoshi used both meetings to make the case for direct U.S. pressure on Prime Minister Maliki to release funds for Maysan Province promised by the Iraqi Government after Operation Good Tidings of Peace, and to make more detailed

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plans for how funds will be spent. Hoshi invited U.S. presence at a meeting planned in Baghdad with Deputy Prime Minister Barham Saleh, which would include Maysan PC President Abdul Jabbar Wahid Hamidi (also Sadrists), Hoshi, and high-level representatives of the Ministries of Finance, Health, Education, Higher Education, Reconstruction, and Electricity. The following day, a representative at Saleh's office confirmed to econoff that a meeting had been scheduled for September 7 but would be postponed for several days. He also said that these planning meetings occur regularly and that the USG had participated in similar meetings in the past, and was welcome to do so again.

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